



The Planning Advantage

Full Mitigation Best Practice Story

Middlesex County, Massachusetts

Middlesex, MA – Federal requirements since 2000 have called for local jurisdictions to have multi-hazard mitigation plans in place to be eligible for FEMA project grants. At the local level, developing a hazard mitigation plan can not only meet the requirement, but it can also be advantageous to the community.



Hazard mitigation planning can result in a better understanding of the funding requirements, which can result in solid grant applications. Sarah Zingarelli, Hazard Mitigation Planner of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, said “When a community actively participates during the planning process, they benefit by having a better understanding of their risks to natural hazards.”

In Northern Middlesex County there was an additional interest in planning. Repeated flooding situations along three rivers in the region, the Shawsheen, Concord, and especially the Merrimack, had driven home the importance of hazard mitigation planning.

Not only were the area's economy and the lives of the residents affected, the individual communities found that significant time and resources were needed to manage, respond, and recover from repetitive flooding.

The effects of the recent flooding and the desire to engage in solid planning led towns in the area to take advantage of an opportunity provided by the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments (NMCOG). The NMCOG offered to facilitate regional planning. Beverly Woods, Assistant Director of the NMCOG, explains, “We wanted to give our communities the opportunity to maximize planning and address disaster issues.”

NMCOG efforts to develop a regional multi-hazard mitigation plan and assist member communities in developing local annexes were funded through the Pre Disaster Mitigation Grant Program (PDM-C). When the eight towns and one city, Lowell, realized the time and effort spent participating could solve problems and develop specific projects, they all agreed to participate.

NMCOG conducted a two-tiered planning process. It first held a series of joint workshops with all the communities and then conducted individual town meetings during the eighteen-month planning process.

The first joint meeting focused on the risk and impact of natural disasters in the local geographic area. Already knowing the impact of the flooding, the development of a hazard risk assessment became important to the town representatives. Additional planning sessions helped towns understand the guidance and parameters of the grant program and funding policies.

In the next phase, the NMCOG organized individual local teams to discuss specific challenges, suggestions and opportunities. A cross section of each town's local departments and disciplines attended the meetings. Representatives from town departments included planners, first responders, emergency managers, engineers, highway superintendents, town managers, elected officials, health agents, and conservation agents. These local teams used their risk assessments to develop customized action items and strategies for specific mitigation projects within each community.

Currently NMCOG is in possession of an approved regional hazard mitigation plan and each member community has a localized plan. The immediate results are several well-planned, fundable hazard mitigation projects. Mitigation projects totaling more than a half-million dollars have been recommended to FEMA for funding in this year's grant cycle.

Woods says she is pleased to know the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments has assisted member communities in developing hazard mitigation plans that will not sit on the shelf, but instead will be useful in minimizing the risk to natural hazards.

Activity/Project Location

Geographical Area: **Single County in a State**

FEMA Region: **Region I**

State: **Massachusetts**

County: **Middlesex County**

City/Community: **Billerica; Chelmsford; Cochituate; Dunstable; Lowell; Pepperell;
Tewksbury; Tyngsboro; Westford**

Key Activity/Project Information

Sector: **Public**

Hazard Type: **Winter Storm; Severe Storm; Flooding**

Activity/Project Type: **Mitigation Planning/Disaster Resistant Universities**

Activity/Project Start Date: **10/2004**

Activity/Project End Date: **07/2006**

Funding Source: **Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM)**

Funding Recipient Name: **Northern Middlesex Council of Governments**

Activity/Project Economic Analysis

Cost: **\$52,000.00 (Estimated)**

Activity/Project Disaster Information

Mitigation Resulted From Federal
Disaster? **Unknown**

Value Tested By Disaster? **No**

Repetitive Loss Property? **No**

Reference URLs

Reference URL 1: **<http://www.nmcog.org>**

Reference URL 2: **<http://www.floodsmart.gov>**

Main Points

- Repeated flooding situations along three rivers in the region highlighted the importance of hazard mitigation planning.
- The effects of the recent flooding and the desire to engage in solid planning led towns in the area to take advantage of an opportunity provided by the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments (NMCOG).
- NMCOG first held a series of joint workshops with all the communities and then conducted individual town meetings in order to develop a hazard risk assessment and to discuss specific challenges, suggestions and opportunities.
- NMCOG is currently in possession of an approved regional hazard mitigation plan and each member community has a localized plan.



Northern Middlesex Council of Governments sponsors Mitigation Planning